

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 PANAMA 4007/1

STADIS/EXDIS////////////////////////////////////

E.O. 11652/ XGDS

TAGS: PN, PFOR, PQ

SUBJECT: TALK WITH TORRIJOS

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROGERS AND AMBASSADOR BUNKER

SUMMARY: THE FOLLOWING RELATES A FRIENDLY BUT GLOOMY MEETING THIS MORNING WITH PANAMANIAN CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT GENERAL OMAR TORRIJOS. HE MAKES IT CLEAR THAT HE IS IN A TOUGH SPOT. EXTREMISTS, ESPECIALLY STUDENTS, ARE RESTIVE AND EXERTING INCREASING PRESSURE. HE FORESTALLED DEMONSTRATIONS OVER THE PAST SEVERAL DAYS BY PROMISING TO MEET WITH THEM TOMORROW. IT WILL BE A STORMY SESSION BUT HE WILL CONTINUE TO TRY TO KEEP THE LID ON. WHAT WOULD HELP HIM MOST, HE MAKES CLEAR, IS A DECISION BY THE US TO RESUME NEGOTIATIONS ON A REALISTIC BASIS AND AT AN EARLY DATE. HE ASSURED ME HE RETAINS STRONG FAITH IN SECRETARY KISSINGER AND AMBASSADOR BUNKER. BUT HE IS DEEPLY WORRIED ABOUT THE INCREASINGLY EFFECTIVE AND NEGATIVE ROLE OF THE CONGRESS IN SETTLEMENT OF THE PANAMA PROBLEM. AND HE IS EVEN MORE WORRIED BY THE RUMBLING VOLCANO OF PROTEST THAT THREATENS TO ERUPT ANY TIME. HE BELIEVES A FAIR SETTLEMENT WOULD BE GOOD FOR BOTH PARTIES. HE IS CERTAIN THAT FAILURE WILL LEAD TO VIOLENT CONSEQUENCES THAT WILL DAMAGE HIS COUNTRY AND OURS. HE ASKS US, INDEED ALMOST BEGS US, NOT TO MAKE FRIENDLY PANAMANIAN INTO ENEMIES--TO THE INCALCULABLE DISADVANTAGE OF US BOTH. HE HAS NO INTENTION OF LOOKING TO THE COMMUNISTS FOR SUPPORT. BUT HE WILL JOIN THE NON-SECRET

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ALIGNED WORLD IN PERU NEXT MONTH. AND HE WILL RAISE THE PANAMA ISSUE IN THE UNITED NATIONS IN NOVEMBER. HE CONSIDERS THIS IS THE LEAST HE CAN DO--TO KEEP PRESSURE ON US AND RELIEVE PRESSURES HERE. HE IS DEEPLY AFRAID

THAT THIS WILL BE FAR FROM ENOUGH TO PREVENT VIOLENCE IN THIS COUNTRY. AND HE ASKS FOR OUR HELP AND UNDERSTANDING TO MEET WHAT HE VIEWS AS A COMMON DANGER. END SUMMARY

1. I HAVE JUST RETURNED FROM A FRIENDLY BUT SOMEWHAT GRAVE DISCUSSION WITH GENERAL TORRIJOS ON COTADORA. HE IS TENSE, CONCERNED AND SOMEWHAT PUZZLED. QUOTE WHY UNQUOTE HE ASKED AT ONE POINT REQUOTE DOES YOUR COUNTRY SEEM ALMOST TO WANT TO MAKE ENEMIES OF ITS FRIENDS QUERY UNQUOTE. HE WAS CLEARLY PREOCCUPIED WITH A MEETING HE WILL HAVE TOMORROW WITH MILITANT STUDENT GROUPS AND LEADERS. HE SAID HE HAD BEEN ABLE TO FORESTALL STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS OVER THE 4TH OF JULY HOLIDAYS AND TODAY ONLY BY PROMISING TOMORROW'S MEETING. OUTSIDE THE ROOM, WAITING FOR US TO CONCLUDE OUR SESSION, WERE HIS G-2, LT. COL. NORIEGA, EDUCATION MINISTER ROYO AND UNIVERSITY RECTOR ESCOBAR. TORRIJOS TOLD ME HE HAD GATHERED THEM TO HELP WORK OUT STRATEGY FOR DEALING WITH THE INCREASINGLY RESTIVE AND EXTREMIST STUDENTS. QUOTE BUT WHAT DO I TELL THEM QUERY UNQUOTE HE ASKED ALMOST PLAINTIVELY.

2. TORRIJOS OPENED CONVERSATION BY REFERRING TO MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY KISSINGER THAT I HAD REPORTED EARLIER TO HIM BY TELEPHONE. I HAD ONLY BEEN ABLE IN CRYPTIC PHONE MESSAGE TO SAY THAT SECRETARY WANTED HIM TO KNOW THAT WE REMAINED DEDICATED TO SOLUTION OF OUR PROBLEM OF ESTABLISHING A NEW RELATIONSHIP. IN ELABORATING THIS MORNING, I TOLD HIM SECRETARY WANTED HIM TO KNOW THAT THINGS LIKE MIAMI HERALD STORY (OF

JULY 4) AND SNYDER AMENDMENT WERE IN A WAY TRIBUTES TO WHAT HE AND TORRIJOS WERE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH. SUCCESS ACHIEVED SO FAR IN NEGOTIATIONS HAD INSPIRED THOSE WHO OPPOSE PROGRESS ON THIS FRONT TO TAKE ANY STEPS THEY CAN TO DISCOURAGE OR PREVENT FURTHER MOVEMENT. NONETHELESS, I SAID, HE SHOULD KNOW THAT OUR SECRETARY OF STATE CON-
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TINUED TO BELIEVE IN, AND DESIRED TO WORK TOWARD, A FINAL AND FAIR SOLUTION TO OUR PROBLEM AND THE CREATION OF A MORE MODERN RELATIONSHIP.

3. TORRIJOS ASKED IF HE COULD USE THE MESSAGE PUBLICLY. I SAID THAT WAS IMPOSSIBLE BECAUSE IT WAS SENT AS A CONFIDENTIAL AND PERSONAL EXPRESSION. MOREOVER, IT DEALT WITH DELICATE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE BRANCHES AND WOULD ONLY SERVE TO EXACERBATE THAT PROBLEM IF PUT INTO PUBLIC DOMAIN. HE CLAIMED TO UNDERSTAND, THOUGH CLEARLY DISAPPOINTED. QUOTE WHAT CAN I SAY QUERY UNQUOTE HE ASKED. I SAID THAT I SAW NO PROBLEM WITH TELLING STUDENTS THAT HE WAS IN

DIRECT CONTACT WITH SECRETARY KISSINGER, THAT HE HAD CONFIDENCE IN HIM AND IN THE OTHERS CONCERNED WITH NEGOTIATIONS, AND THAT HE FELT A SOLUTION FAIR TO BOTH PARTIES WOULD BE REACHED. HE LOOKED AT ME AS THOUGH TO SAY THAT WAS RATHER THIN GRUEL, BUT SAID NOTHING.

4. A FEW MINUTES LATER, HE SAID THAT THE THING THAT WOULD HELP THE GENERAL SITUATION MOST WOULD BE HIS BEING ABLE TO STATE THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS WOULD RESUME ON A CERTAIN DATE IN THE NEAR FUTURE. IT WAS CLEAR FROM THE GENERAL'S WORDS--AND FROM WHAT WE HAVE BEEN HEARING FROM KNOWLEDGEABLE PANAMANIAN OVER THE PAST SEVERAL DAYS--THAT THE PASSAGE OF THE SNYDER AMENDMENT WAS A SEVERE BLOW TO HIM, TO HIS CLOSEST COLLEAGUES, AND TO THOSE PANAMANIAN WHOSE HOPES FOR THE FUTURE REST ON A REASONABLE AND JUST SETTLEMENT WITH THE US. ALL OF THEM ARE NOW DISHEARTENED AND PESSIMISTIC. THE GENERAL THEN SAID--LOOKING NOT ONLY AT THE PRESENT IMPASSE BUT AT THE LONG RECORD OF TALKS OVER THE PAST DECADE--QUOTE EVERY TIME WE SEEM TO BE MOVING AHEAD, SOME PROBLEM ALWAYS SEEMS TO COME UP IN UNITED STATES, POLITICAL OR OTHERWISE, THAT PREVENTS FURTHER ACTION UNQUOTE. AND IT WAS AT THIS POINT THAT HE RAISED THE QUESTION OF WHY WE SEEMED SO INTENT ON MAKING ENEMIES OF OUR BEST FRIENDS.

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